

THE PHILOSOPHY OF COMMUNISM

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

FREEDOM IN THE MODERN WORLD
INTERPRETING THE UNIVERSE

THE PHILOSOPHY OF COMMUNISM

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I

ORIGINS OF COMMUNIST PHILOSOPHY

The development of communism in the modern world is a phenomenon of obvious importance and one which demands careful consideration and understanding. Unlike most political movements it has an explicit philosophy of its own which forms an important part of the development of philosophy in the nineteenth century. It is derived directly from the classical idealism of Hegel and it has had a development which is both theoretically vigorous and practically significant. I propose, therefore, to attempt to explain as simply as possible the origin and nature of the philosophy of communism, because the subject itself is one that has an immediate bearing upon the social questions which press so heavily upon us all at the present time. The first chapter I shall devote to the consideration of the origin of the philosophy of communism and the second

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to a consideration of the most important characteristics which differentiate it from other philosophical systems. In the last two chapters I shall try to estimate its value and to point out some of its more important practical bearings.

In the first place, however, it is necessary to guard against certain misconceptions which are apt to vitiate the study of the theoretical aspects of communism at the start. It is only natural that we should think of communism in terms of the existing situation in Soviet Russia. There is obviously good reason for this tendency; but in certain respects it is dangerously misleading. I do not refer to the emotional reactions which are apt to warp our judgments of the revolution and its subsequent social and political results. I take it for granted here that we are anxious to understand rather than to judge. But even if we approach the consideration of Russia with open minds we are apt to forget that Russia at present is not a communist society even on communist theory. The main reason why this is so is that there exists at present in Soviet Russia a dictatorship and, therefore, a system of government and of social organization determined by the dictatorship. We must remind ourselves that the existence of the dictator-

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ship is inconsistent with the realization of communism. This statement would, I think, have the assent of all intelligent communists. In the political philosophy of communism the dictatorship of the proletariat is a phenomenon of the transition from a capitalist to a communist society, and the dictatorship is justified only as a necessary instrument of the transition. The appearance, therefore, of the communist society would necessarily involve the disappearance of the dictatorship. Until the dictatorship has disappeared, the effort to create a communist society has not been finally successful. Dictatorship, so far from being an important feature of a communist society, is incompatible with it. This is one of the essential differences between communism and fascism.

We must also guard against the confusion between the theory of communism and the theory of the steps by which a communist society may be brought into existence. The theory of revolutionary strategy under capitalist conditions by which the supersession of capitalism might be brought about is one thing. The theory of communism is another. No doubt there is in any communist philosophy a close connexion between these two

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things. It is all the more important not to confuse them. If the theory of revolution turned out to be a false one, that would not in itself invalidate the theory of communist society. I stress this point because I think that a great many people and even a great many communists are guilty of the confusion and, therefore, think of communism as somehow essentially bound up with a particular theory of how communism is to be realized.

With these warnings against possible confusion of thought we may begin our study of the philosophy of communism by inquiring into its origins. This question of origins calls up at once the name of Karl Marx. Rightly so. But the mere consideration of the writings of Marx does not solve the question of origins. Marx himself never worked out a philosophical system, though his mind was a philosophical mind of the first quality. Even the sociological aspect of Marxism was never elaborated by Marx himself. His greatness consisted in his capacity to use theories, which he himself did not create, in a new way. The principles which underlie this new use of older theories have to be discovered by their presence in Marx's critical writings and in his economic works. They are employed in the construction of these works at

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every point. But it is only occasionally that they are explicitly defined by Marx himself. Besides this difficulty of elucidating the new philosophical principles which are embodied in the work of Marx there is the difficulty of defining the positive debt which Marx owes to predecessors and contemporaries whom he is concerned to attack and refute. We must endeavour to get behind Marx if we are to discover the origins of Marxian philosophy.

The immediate philosophical background of Marx's thought is the philosophy of Hegel, and in particular Hegel's logical theory of the dialectical process of thought. Marx attacked the idealism of the Hegelian philosophy, but he accepted the Hegelian logic. It would be fair to say, I believe, that Marx's acceptance of the logical form of Hegelianism is more complete and uncompromising an acceptance than we can find in any other post-Hegelian thinker, even in those who would be most properly styled pure Hegelians. This is the first point of real importance in the understanding of communist philosophy. In spite of its uncompromising rejection of idealism it remains formally Hegelian through and through. Now the dialectical logic of Hegel is by far the most import-

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ant element in Hegelianism; besides being one of the supreme achievements of human thought. As pure logic it is neither idealist nor realist, though Hegel used it as the basis of an idealist metaphysic. In itself it is an account of the process of thought considered as a process of growth or development. Whether this is a complete or an adequate account of thinking is not the point of main importance. What is important is that the dialectical logic of Hegel provides for the first time a logical instrument for the description and analysis of processes of development. In this sense it is, in general outline, the final discovery of how all processes of an organic character can be thought and understood. It is the mind's instrument for exploring the world of the life-processes. By means of this dialectical instrument all organic processes of development can be analysed and grasped—and by no other means. The Hegelian dialectic is, therefore, the only available instrument which is adequate to provide the scientific understanding of organic processes and consequently to secure the control of such processes, based upon understanding.

The Hegelian philosophy may be said to rest upon three fundamental assertions which, taken

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together, determine the system throughout. They are as follows:

- (1) All organic processes are dialectical.
- (2) Reality is an organic process.
- (3) Reality is idea.

The first of these assertions is accepted by Marx and by all communist philosophy since Marx. The second is accepted by orthodox communist philosophy at the present day, which is generally described as the philosophy of dialectical materialism. It is doubtful, however, whether it was accepted by Marx himself. The third general principle is rejected explicitly by Marx and by communist philosophy. We must look a little further, therefore, into these principles.

The first, that 'all organic processes are dialectical', is the essential common ground between Hegelianism and Marxism. It is essentially a logical principle, which determines the method by which an organic process must be thought. It denies, in the first place, that it is possible to describe and interpret organic processes by means of the traditional logical forms based upon the hard and fast application of the law of contradiction. An organic process is a process of development; a process not of 'being' but of 'becoming'. At one stage it is A, and

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at the next it is B and not A. That description itself is a falsification because a process of development never *is* at any stage. It is essentially a 'becoming' throughout. Any stage A is really A-becoming-not-A-but-B. Hence any description of the process involves the recognition of the emergence of the contradictory at every point, and the synthesis of contradictories in the further development. For the analysis and understanding of organic processes, therefore, a new logic is necessary. This logic Hegel supplied. The acceptance of this first principle by Marx and the communists is, therefore, an acceptance of the Hegelian logic as the only instrument of thought for the interpretation of all organic processes and the rejection of all other forms of logic as inapplicable to such processes. We need not go further into the implications of this. It will suffice to notice that it is this which differentiates communist philosophy from all other non-idealist philosophies and makes it 'dialectical', and also that it involves the rejection of mechanism and, therefore, of causal determinism. Communist philosophy is anti-mechanist and anti-determinist in the same sense that modern idealism is.

The second principle, that 'reality is an organic

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process', is common to Hegelian idealism and dialectical materialism. This is not a logical but a metaphysical principle. Taken together with the first principle, that 'all organic processes are dialectical', it yields the conclusion that reality is a dialectical process. The first principle merely states that any process of development must be understood through a particular method of thought. It does not imply that this method of thought can be used as a philosophical instrument for interpreting the nature of the world as a whole. The second principle adds this assertion and so justifies the claim of the Hegelians and of the dialectical materialists to found a metaphysic upon the principle of dialectical logic. With this we reach the position that the world-process as a whole is a dialectical process.

Now, I have said that though this position is accepted by orthodox communist philosophy at the present time, it is not indubitably accepted by Marx. It is, I think, undoubtedly present in the writings of Friedrich Engels, and the close co-operation of Marx and Engels makes it rather difficult to distinguish between the two men. There is some Marxian research in progress at present which aims at distinguishing the contributions of

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these men to what is currently known as Marxian theory. We must await the results of this research before it is safe to be quite definite. All that we can say at the moment is that it is curious that though Marx did not definitely reject this principle as it appears in writings with which he himself was so closely associated, he never committed himself to it unequivocally, and there is evidence to show that this non-committal attitude was a deliberate one. It is worth noting in this connexion that Marx was a man of highly critical philosophical ability, while Engels, though a very able man, was not outstandingly philosophical. The importance of the point lies in this, that without the acceptance of this second principle it is impossible to turn the social and economic teachings of Marx into the philosophy of dialectical materialism, while it might be possible to supply an alternative metaphysical principle which would yield a different metaphysical system and yet be in accordance with his social doctrines. It ought to be added that the metaphysical principle which we are discussing and which is the metaphysical foundation both of modern idealism and of dialectical materialism is the simplest and most natural way of providing a philosophical

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basis for Marxian social theory. It is not, for all that, necessitated by Marx's views, nor did he himself provide a philosophical system, though he was eminently capable of doing so, if he had chosen. On this point I shall have more to say in the third chapter.

The principle which Marx did supply is not a metaphysical but a sociological principle. It is the assertion that the process of human society is an organic process and, therefore, only to be understood dialectically. Thus Marx used the Hegelian logic to interpret social history without going so far as to assert that reality as such is an organic process. But this principle of Marxian sociology has a negative metaphysical implication. It implies that reality is either organic or superorganic. It negates any mechanistic metaphysic. This is a matter of some importance, because the use of the term materialism to describe communist philosophy is misleading. When we use the term 'materialism' we normally take it to imply a mechanistic determinism, while 'dialectical materialism', like modern idealism, rests on the repudiation of mechanistic determinism.

We have now to consider the third general principle upon which the Hegelian philosophy

rests—the principle that ‘reality is idea’. As this is the point at which Marx parts company with Hegel, definitely and uncompromisingly, we must make an effort to secure a clear and simple understanding of the issue. I have called the first two principles the logical and the metaphysical principles of Hegelianism. This third principle I propose to call the axiological principle, that is to say, the principle of valuation. In discussions of modern idealism, whether for the defence or for the attack, it is usually taken for granted that the idealist character of the Hegelian philosophy derives directly from its logical position and that, therefore, to maintain a realist position it is necessary to attack and demolish the logical basis of Hegel’s thought. This is a profound error. There were idealists before the Hegelian logic was thought of—Berkeley, for instance—and in dialectical materialism we have a thorough-going realism which accepts the Hegelian logic. It is necessary, therefore, to look for the origin of the principle that reality is idea, and so for the distinction between idealism and realism, not in the field of logic or of the theory of knowledge, but in another quarter. The belief that reality is idea expresses a principle of value and lies deeper than any logical

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or metaphysical principle, in the field of motive and desire. It is for this reason that I call the principle that 'reality is idea' an axiological principle. It asserts, in effect, the primacy of the idea. In plain language, it lays down as a principle of value that thoughts are more important than things, that the significance of the world lies not in itself but in our idea of it. It is this that realism denies.

We cannot get away from the primary fact that there is a distinction between things and ideas. For ordinary common sense an idea is the idea of something, a thought in our minds which *represents* the things that it is the idea of. In that case the thing is the reality while the idea is merely 'how the thing appears to us'. Our thought must, therefore, adapt itself to things if it is to be proper thought, that is to say, if our idea is to be true. If the idea does not correspond with the thing of which it is the idea, then the idea is false and useless. The thing will not accommodate itself to our idea of it. We have to change our ideas and keep on changing them till we get them right. Now, such a common-sense way of thinking is essentially realist, and it is realist because it makes the 'thing' and not the 'idea' the measure of validity, the

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centre of significance. It makes the thing real and the idea the true or false appearance of the thing.

It might seem that any other view was merely absurd and nonsensical—and so I think it is. Yet all idealism, Hegel's as much as Berkeley's, asserts the precise opposite. It asserts that the thing is the appearance of the idea. There must, therefore, be some show of reason at least for this peculiar inversion of the normal attitude. Let us ask what it is.

In the first place we must remember that the philosopher's business is with ideas. He is a thinker and, on the cobbler's principle that there's nothing like leather, ideas are more important to him than things. It is, therefore, natural for the man of ideas to throw emphasis upon the world of thought. His preoccupation with thought tends to make thought more important *to him* than things. This passes naturally, though fallaciously, into the assertion that thoughts are more important in their nature than things, which is only another way of saying that reality is idea.

In the second place, all reflective activities, of which thought is one, do involve the primacy of the idea. The immediate aim of reflective thought is knowledge and, therefore, for reflection it is the knowledge of things, not things themselves, which

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forms the governing principle. Thus, if we make the life of reflection the higher activity of human life, we inevitably make the idea more important than the thing. If we think that the life of the mind is higher or nobler or more important than the life of practical activity, we must go on to admit, in principle, that the idea is more important, or more significant, than the thing. In the æsthetic field there is a parallel to this. The artist who lives for his art or the æsthete who prizes the work of art above the ordinary products of life, is committed in principle to the view that the image is more significant than the thing of which it is an image, and so to the 'reality' of the image.

Thirdly, there is the particular difficulty about the criterion of truth. How can we discover whether our ideas are true? If we are confined to the theoretical field, then we can only test our ideas by thinking. How is it possible to test the truth of a thought by a thing? Even if you look at the thing to see if your thought about it is true, you are testing your thought not by the thing but by the visual appearance of the thing, and that itself is an idea, in some sense, because it is 'in your mind'. So runs the argument. And it is a very difficult argument to meet. Its result is to suggest

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that thought must be its own criterion; that our knowledge of the world, i.e., the idea of the world, is the world so far as we are concerned. We cannot know the world except in our idea of it; so that the thing, as we call it, is identical with the true and adequate idea of the thing. Reality is, therefore, the true idea, not something which is not idea at all.

Now, this argument for idealism is only difficult to meet, indeed it only seems reasonable, provided we confine ourselves to a purely theoretical attitude. Of course, if you confine yourself to thought, then thought must be the important thing and the real thing, because it is the only thing. But there is something else besides 'the thing' which we contrast with thought, and that is action. When we are thinking we are not doing anything. We are immersed in ideas. But the moment we begin to act we find ourselves in contact with things, not with ideas. It is in action that the distinction between things and ideas arises and asserts itself, and the very appearance of the distinction destroys the idealist principle. The idea of my finger in the flame of a candle may imply the idea of pain, but it does not produce pain. The idea of myself as Prime Minister of Great Britain may afford me an

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ideal satisfaction, but if I try to act upon it I shall find myself either in jail or in an asylum. Which place of confinement I reach will depend upon the tenacity with which I cling to my principle that reality is idea.

It is at this point that we can realize the reason for the Marxian rejection of idealism. To hold that reality is idea is to hold that thought is primary and action secondary. It is to mean that action is for the sake of thought, not thought for the sake of action. It is, in practice, to make thought an end in itself and knowledge the goal of life. It is to set up thought as the judge of life and deny that life can judge thought. Idealism, when it asserts the primacy of ideas over things, is ridiculous; when it asserts the primacy of the activity of thinking over the activity of real life, it is perverse. It is, in fact, the rationalization of the desire to escape from action and so from responsibility. It represents the tendency to substitute ideas for things, to take refuge from reality in imagination, to live in make-believe.

In his uncompromising repudiation of the principle that reality is idea, then, Marx is rejecting a principle of valuation which sets theory above practice, and so refuses to carry thought

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into action. He is asserting that, on the contrary, things are prior to ideas, and that action is primary and thought secondary in the nature of things. This does not imply in any sense that thought is unimportant, but simply that in the nature of things thought depends for its significance upon the action which embodies it, and that the effort to subordinate the activity of life to thought frustrates life and cancels the reality of thought. Thinking is one of the functions of life, and has significance only in relation to life itself; and life is action, not imagination; it is practice, not theory. This is what Marx meant in the often quoted sentence: 'Philosophers hitherto have explained the world in different ways; the task is to change it.' Thought verifies itself in action, and only in action. Idealism, asserting the primacy of the idea, is merely an effort to burke the verification.

The social implications of this rejection of the axiological principle of Hegelianism by communist philosophy we shall examine in the second chapter. For the remainder of this discussion of the origins of communist philosophy I wish to indicate another source of Marxian thought which has a special importance in that it is

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generally overlooked, although it supplies a clue to the values which underlie Marxian sociology. I refer to the philosophical anarchism of Max Stirner. The other obvious sources, such as the philosophy of Ludwig Feuerbach, merely represent stages in the rejection of idealism. Stirner supplies something new. His philosophical position is stated in a book which he called *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*—the Self and its Selfdom. The importance which Marx attached to this work is shown by the fact that the first of the four great personal polemics in which he defined his position was directed against Stirner. Marx only troubled to attack people with whom he had enough in common to make it worth while.

Stirner was an apostle of freedom, and he carried the idea of individual freedom to the extreme limits of anarchist thought. For him freedom is the supreme good. That is his first principle. The main enemy of freedom is the tyranny of ideas. That is his second principle, and it makes him deny the reality of ideas. An example will make clear what is meant. It is not so long since the idea that it is wicked to go to the theatre was widespread in this country. That idea limited the freedom of the people who held it. I have heard

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of a professor of English Literature who held this idea so strongly that though he lectured on the English dramatists all his life he had never seen a play staged. That is an example of the tyranny of ideas, and Stirner maintained that all ideas were in that way restrictions upon personal freedom and that, therefore, the way to freedom was to get rid of the hold that ideas have upon our minds. It is this position which Marx attacked. But it is the nature of the attack that is important. Marx never attacked these two main principles of Stirner's. That can only mean that he was in agreement with them. What he did attack was the implication that you have only to rid yourself of ideas and reach down to the personal reality of the self below the ideas to find freedom. (One might note in passing that this position of Stirner's resembles substantially the position of D. H. Lawrence in our own day.) It was the individualism of this position that Marx attacked, and he attacked it because it was secretly idealistic. It implied that you could rid yourself of the tyranny of thought by thinking.

Against this Marx pointed out two things. The first is that these ideas are social ideas and that the self is a member of society. What is the use of ridding myself of the idea that it is wrong to buy

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champagne at a night club after closing hours if the law refuses to allow me to do so? Getting rid of the idea will not get rid of the fact that I am not free to buy the champagne. If the destruction of the tyranny of ideas is to be effective, the ideas must be broken not in my own mind merely but in the minds of everybody, or at least of the people who control the making and enforcement of the laws. The second point that Marx insists upon is that those ideas which cramp our freedom, though they are unreal in themselves, do nevertheless reflect a reality which imposes them upon the minds of people in a social system. This reality is the actual economic situation. You might get rid of the idea that it was wrong to buy champagne at midnight and you might persuade the law-makers to make it legal, but you would still not be free to buy it if you hadn't enough money. Why were the Scots such strict Sabbatarians two generations ago? It was not really a religious motive which made them so. If they had wished they could have found a dozen texts in the New Testament to justify the view that Sabbatarianism was not Christian. It was not that the Scots were by nature averse to pleasure any more than any other people. It was simply that they were too

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poor to afford it. If Scotland was to wring the necessities of life from a poor and difficult soil, it was necessary that she should develop in all her citizens a Spartan discipline, ready to face unremitting toil and hardship. So Marx concluded that the governing factor of the fight for freedom was the economic situation. That is the real meaning of the economic interpretation of history. It is not a dogma. It is an assertion of fact.

Marx, then, took something essential from Stirner and qualified it, just as he did in the case of Hegel. He accepted the principle that it is freedom that we are after, and so took his stand firmly in the democratic tradition. He agreed also that ideas limit freedom and that it is necessary to get behind ideas to the personal reality which they represent. But he added that this personal reality is essentially social, that it is the reality of personal relationships in society, and further, that what determines the relation of persons in society is the economic reality which they face. The way to freedom lies through the control of economic necessity by the development of man's power over nature. The tyranny of ideas is the reflection of this real situation. In other words, the way to destroy the tyranny of Sabbatarianism is not to

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attack the idea but to change the economic situation which it reflects. Marx might have pointed to the history of Scotland in the last two generations as an example. As Scotland has grown richer, Sabbatarianism has automatically declined.

NOTE ON DIALECTIC

Dialectic means originally the art of conversation and it was used by the Greeks as a technical term for a formal discussion carried on under what one might call rules of procedure. As a method for discovering truth it was perfected by Socrates and carefully defined by Plato. We can use this original meaning of the term to illustrate what is meant by a dialectical process. To any discussion there are two parties. The first is required to state an opinion, which becomes the subject of discussion. This position is the thesis. It is then the business of the second person to produce objections to the thesis and in doing so to develop a position which contradicts the thesis. This contradictory position is the antithesis, and we see how it develops out of the thesis. Now in that situation discussion may be carried on in two ways. It may become a mere battle of wits in which the cleverer of the two opponents gets the better of the other.

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In that case either the thesis or the antithesis is driven off the field, and one of the two remains as victor. But on the other hand, both parties may really co-operate to discover the truth of the matter. Then we may be sure that some of the objections to the thesis will be perfectly valid. The two disputants will convince one another that each is partly right and partly wrong. And if they are successful they will find themselves in the end agreeing to a position which is neither the thesis nor the antithesis but a new position which does justice to whatever is positive in both. This new position overcomes the blank contradiction between the thesis and the antithesis and combines them. It is, therefore, called the synthesis, and this process, in which an earlier position leads first to the production of its contradictory and finally to a new position which combines both, is a development of knowledge. Such a development proceeds dialectically.

Now, the same thing may happen in the mind of the individual. Formal logic informs us that of two contradictory statements one must be true and the other false. Yet when we come to the real processes of thinking, what we discover is something different. Suppose we find ourselves

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considering a theory that seems at first sight thoroughly sound. If we examine it carefully and let our minds play upon it from all sides, we shall discover that objections to it begin to take shape, and these objections begin to suggest a contradictory theory. We shall then find ourselves weighing up the evidence in favour of two opposite theories. But we will not decide to accept either. We will seek to discover a new theory which does justice both to the original thesis and to the antithetical view which developed in our minds by considering the thesis carefully. It is this process, adopted as a deliberate and formal method of thinking, that is properly called dialectic. And we can see, in this example, what is meant by saying that the thesis generates its own antithesis and finally combines with it in a new synthesis. In such a process contradiction is not final. It is an essential element in the development of thought.

II

GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF MARXIAN THEORY

So far I have been concerned to show that, to a very large extent, communist philosophy is in fundamental agreement with Hegelianism. We saw that the one essential point of difference lay in the Marxian repudiation of the idealist principle that reality is idea. The completeness of that repudiation of idealism lies in the recognition that idealism arises from valuing ideas above things. Now the distinction between ideas and things arises only in practical activity. To be a realist, therefore, means not merely to make ideas subordinate to things; it means to make thought subordinate to action, to make theory subordinate to practice. A realism which fails to do this is only the idea of realism. That would be the communist philosopher's criticism of modern realism. It remains within the field of ideas and is, therefore, a kind of inverted idealism. Just as talking about

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action is not acting, so talking realistically is not being realistic.

Thus there comes directly out of the rejection of idealism the first fundamental principle of Marxian philosophy—that theory and practice are one. This principle is the revolutionary principle of communist philosophy. Everything else in communist thought dwindles into insignificance beside it. To accept it is to break with the whole tradition of European thought and to demand a completely new culture on a new social and economic basis. You may drop or refute all the particular theories of Marxian economics and even the interpretation of social history; but if you accept this theory of the unity of theory and practice you are still committed to a complete revolution both on the theoretical and on the practical sides of life. Our first task, therefore, is to understand this principle.

The first point to grasp is that the principle asserts that as a matter of fact theory and practice are inseparably bound up. In other words, there is a necessary relation between the theory that a man professes and the way in which he behaves. This does not mean that a man's practice may not be in contradiction with his theory. It means that

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if it is in contradiction there is a reason for that contradiction and that the reason is always a practical one. The very simplest instance of this is telling a lie. If I say that I have not done something that I have done, there is an obvious contradiction between my theory and my action. But there is also a reason for this contradiction, and the reason is not theoretical but practical. For deliberate deceit there is always a practical reason. On the other hand, it is possible to make a statement which is unconsciously deceptive. When I tell a lie I deceive someone else. But I may deceive myself as well as other people. When I do this with reference to my own conduct I am making a mistake about my real motive. Now we all know how easy it is to do this. We notice it constantly in other people when, for example, they judge people whom they dislike harshly. They think they are speaking the truth, and yet we know that they are biassed by their dislike and that their dislike is practical, not theoretical. Thus a person's theory may be a self-deception, and that always means that though he thinks he believes it he does not really believe it. The reason for such self-deception is always practical. Where, then, there is a contradiction between a person's theory and his practice, there

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is a practical reason for the contradiction. This is the first point to notice. The unity of theory and practice does not mean that theory and practice are always in harmony. It means that there is a necessary relation between them and that where they are not in agreement the reason for the disagreement is to be found in the practical field. In other words, practice determines theory.

Now, this is something that we all know instinctively. We continually draw a distinction between what a man really believes and what he professes to believe, and we know also that in a great many cases this does not involve conscious hypocrisy. We know that people continually deceive themselves about what they really believe. But how is it that we judge what a person really believes in such a case? It cannot be by considering what he says he believes or what he thinks he believes. In fact, it is by watching how he behaves. When we see anyone act in a way which gives the lie to his professions we say at once that he does not really believe what he professes. And if we are tough-minded and believe in calling a spade a spade, we call him a hypocrite. Here, then, is the first simple meaning of the principle of the unity of theory and practice in communist

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philosophy. If you want to know what people really believe you must study their behaviour.

Now, you may think that this is something quite obvious that everybody agrees with and that it has nothing to do with communism. It sounds more like Christianity. But let me remind you that one of the most annoying things about communists is that they always refuse to take the professed ideas of political parties or business groups or churches or economists at their face value. They are a suspicious people. The reason is that they always will insist on comparing the theories professed by these groups with the way they behave. They think, in fact, that to know what a political party really stands for you must take to a patient study of the general lines of its action when it is in power. Suppose that a party professes to be socialist. Suppose that a study of what it does when in power shows that its actions tend to prevent or postpone the achievement of socialism. Then you have a right to say that the party is not really a socialist party. If you find such a discrepancy between theory and practice you must go on to discover the practical reason for the discrepancy. In other words, the real reason for the discrepancy will be found in some deception, conscious or uncon-

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scious, with regard to the motives which determine the party's action. It does not matter whether the deception is deliberate or unconscious. It may quite well be a self-deception. But since action is primary it is action that counts. A political party claims my support and allegiance. Before I can reasonably support it, I must know not what it says it will do, nor what it thinks it will do, but what it actually is likely to do. And I can only know that by discovering what are the real motives which will determine its behaviour if it is returned to power. For this reason the great political need is to discover what are the real, practical motives which do, in fact, determine political action.

The second meaning of the principle of the unity of theory and practice is that theory and practice *ought* to agree. Now, this looks like a pious exhortation to sincerity. But it is, in fact, far more than that. As a moral precept it will only cover cases in which there is deliberate insincerity. And these cases in the field of social practice are not the important ones. What it really means is that a theory which does not harmonize with practice is always dangerous. Self-deception leads to disaster. The true relation between theory and

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action is one which recognizes that theory is always related to action as a means. If a person does not know what he really believes, that is to say if he is unconscious of his real motives, his action is blind, and he becomes a danger to himself and his neighbours. 'If the blind lead the blind both shall fall into the ditch.' Ideas are the eyes of action. It is therefore of supreme importance that we should have a social theory which can be the basis of social action, and that theory should harmonize exactly with our social practice. Since in the unity of theory and practice it is practice that is the determining factor, it is much better that the theory should be an ugly theory than that it should be a beautiful deception. What is important is not that we should have high ideals but that our ideals and our practice should be in agreement. That may seem a hard saying, and it is certainly a revolutionary one. But the alternative is to stumble blindly in the dark to our own destruction.

There is a very important corollary of this which goes to the heart of communist activity. We are familiar with the communist attack on utopianism. We can now understand the meaning of that attack. The separation of theory and practice is really an attempt, as we saw, to isolate ourselves

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from the reality of things in a world of ideas. It is then possible to console ourselves for the unsatisfactory nature of social life as we find it, by building up in our minds the conception of an ideal society. Having done so, we may then try to realize this ideal society in practice. We may say to ourselves that the proper way to reform our actual society is to guide it in the direction of our ideals. Many people think that that is the proper way of social reform. The communist calls it utopianism and condemns it. Why does he do that? Because he thinks that it is simply a particularly disastrous form of self-deception.

How do I form the conception of an ideal society? Obviously out of my feeling of how I should like to live, and what kind of a society I should like to live in. My only material for this is my experience of my actual life and my actual society. Out of my own practice there arises a compensating theory which is itself dictated by the way I am living. There is a hidden unity between my ideal and my practice. I may think, I will probably think, that my ideal is quite independent of my actual life, that it is a pure ideal of universal application, something which everyone else would desire as well as myself. Now that is not merely

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unlikely, it is impossible. The structure of my practical experience will determine the structure of my ideal, and whoever has an experience with a different structure will necessarily frame for himself a different ideal. But that is not all. If I then imagine that I can turn to practical activity and reform society in the fashion of my ideal, I am again undertaking something impossible. I am assuming that society is plastic in my hands, as if I were God making the world afresh. We do not, in fact, stand outside society. We are society. To refashion society is to remake ourselves. Idealism in this form rests upon the delusion that in thought I can lift myself out of the stream of history and think in a way that has no relation to my way of life. It is to think that whenever I please I can come down from the clouds and push the world-process in the direction I should like it to go. The principle of the unity of theory and practice denies this. My thinking is part of my living, and like everything else in my life, it is part of the development of social history. Any social action which attempts to create reality in terms of an idea of what reality should be commits the fallacy of thinking that reality lies in the idea and not in the thing.

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What, then, is the alternative to utopian theories? The alternative is a scientific theory. That is why Marx claimed to make socialism scientific. The unity of theory and practice is actually to be found in experimental science where all theories are tested by action, that is to say, by finding what you can do with them. Science bases itself upon facts, not upon ideas. It allows the facts to dictate its theories, and then tests the theories by more facts in the only way in which ideas can be tested by things, that is, in action. Similarly, in the field of social theory, it is possible to give up idealism and bow to the facts. Instead of trying to construct in idea a conception of what a satisfactory society might be, we can set to work at a harder task, to understand what our actual society is and how it really works. That will show us what is possible and enable us, as ideals do not, to co-operate with the processes which are actually at work; and it will make our action experimental, for out of an accurate knowledge of the social facts a theory will emerge upon which social action can be based and which the action based upon it will either refute or modify or confirm. Thus the principle of the unity of theory and practice dictates a completely new approach to

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social and political practice. If we grasp this, then we shall be able to understand how all the rest of communist theory hangs together. If we do not, if we persist in thinking that communist theory, like other theories, works in terms of ideals and how to achieve them, it will seem just a jumble of organized nonsense.

Let us now take this fundamental principle as a clue to the communist theory of society, and in particular to what is called the economic interpretation of history. The first point we must bear in mind is that for the communist the process of history is a dialectical process. It has to be understood as a process of development. That means that when we seek a scientific understanding of the working of our own society as it is to-day, we must understand it as a stage which has now been reached in a long process of development. It is no use comparing our own society with mediæval society as if they were two instances of the same type of thing. They are two stages in the development of a single process. Our society has grown out of mediæval society, and to understand either of them is necessarily to understand how the one has grown out of the other. Thus, any society is merely a stage in the development of Society.

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Society itself consists of persons in relation to one another. But what is the development of society? It is the change of social form; that is to say, it is the gradual change in the form of human relationships. If we wish to understand this process we shall have to decide what it is that governs the change in the social relationships of persons in society.

In this statement we must stress first the view that society consists of persons in relation. This is to say—to put it in philosophical language—that persons in relation are the substance of society, while everything else is phenomenon or appearance. If, for example, we are discussing the question ‘what changes in society are necessary in order to achieve a social reconstruction?’ we might, as so many people are doing, say that the fundamental change which is necessary is a change in the monetary system. To take this view, that a change in the financial system is a change in the social order, is to deny that society is persons in relation and to assert that it is a network of financial institutions. It is possible within very wide limits to alter the financial system without altering fundamentally the relations of persons in society. That is why it is possible for financial experts to plead

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for large financial reforms in order to *maintain* the present order of society. More generally—society is not a complex of institutions. That is only a phenomenon of society. In other words, the system of institutions depends upon the relations of people. The relations of people do not depend upon the system of institutions. When we talk as economists of the relation of capital and labour, we are apt to forget that capital and labour are ideas, not things. What, then, are the real things that these ideas represent? Capital, the communist would say, really means the people who live by owning property. Labour means the people who live by selling their power to work. Therefore the relation between capital and labour really means the relation between the people who won't starve if they don't work, and the people who will starve if they don't work. Until you have got down to the relation between people, you haven't reached the reality of the thing you are talking about. If, therefore, we are to understand the meaning of any proposed political reform or economic reform, we have to ask what changes it will make in the relations between persons and groups of persons in society. Or, to take another side of it, if we want to understand the present

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crisis we have to understand it not in terms of trade returns or movements of prices, but in terms of starvation, ill-health and other quite personal changes. Industrial and financial statistics may be an index of these things, but that is the most they can be.

The second point of importance is that to understand society is to understand a process of change. It is not merely the relation of persons in society that we have to understand but how these relationships have become what they are and in what direction they are changing at the present time. We must remember here one of the implications of the principle of the unity of theory and practice, that any real inquiry aims not merely at knowledge—that would be the idealist fallacy—but at the guidance of action. The reason for trying to understand how the relations of persons in society are changing is that we may be able to act intelligently as members of a changing society. Society is in process of changing whether we do anything about it or not. If we want to do something about it we must understand the process itself. Therefore the understanding of society is the understanding of the process of history. Without an understanding of the historical process

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which has produced the stage of social relationships to which we belong we cannot act intelligently in the present. And because the historical process is a process of development it can only be understood dialectically. Let us ask what it means to interpret social history dialectically.

Suppose we wish to use history to help us to deal with our present difficulties. How are we to do it? We may look for instances of similar difficulties in the past which have overtaken other societies. We may try to discover how these difficulties were overcome or why they were not overcome. We may then judge that we must avoid these past failures and adopt the remedies that proved successful in the past. If we proceed in this way we are not understanding history dialectically but mechanically. In a mechanical process similar situations repeat themselves over and over again. In a process of development the same situation never recurs in precisely the same form. The historical case with which we compare our present situation is never another instance of the same situation. It is always an earlier stage of the same process of development. And, therefore, the remedy which was efficacious in the earlier case may prove entirely useless in the present situation.

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Let me try to give you two examples of this which are very much to the point.

In discussing the possibility of a violent revolution in this country, we are accustomed to say that the English are so law-abiding and have such a respect for constitutional forms that a violent revolution here is unthinkable. That is an example of non-dialectical thinking. It neglects the time-factor altogether. A dialectical thinker would say that the English people have shown a high degree of respect for constitutional forms since the beginning of the eighteenth century, and particularly during the nineteenth century. He would want to qualify that statement by saying that even during that time it is only the majority of people who have shown this respect in a marked way. He would then point out that at an earlier stage this country went through a period of violent revolution in which there was a long civil war, one king was executed and another king was deposed. That would lead him to ask why at certain stages in the development of this country the English people showed a high degree of disrespect for the constitution and at another stage a highly marked respect for constitutional forms. And he would use his answer to this question to estimate the proba-

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bility of a change back to disrespect for the constitution taking place during the new stage of the process upon which we entered with the conclusion of the War in 1919.

As a second example let us take the question of the likelihood of another European war in which this country would participate. We might say that the English are a peace-loving people and that the desire for peace has grown deeper and more insistent of late years, not merely in England but throughout Europe. We might conclude that the growth of the desire for peace will make war impossible or at least highly improbable. People who love peace don't engage in war. There again we have an example of non-dialectical thought. The dialectical thinker will answer that war is quite consistent with the desire for peace, even though that is a logical contradiction. In the history of Europe there have been two peoples specially marked throughout their history by their love of peace. They are the Romans and the English. Both of them have been great war-makers and have developed great empires by the use of their military capacity. That may sound contradictory and yet it is obviously and demonstrably a matter of fact. Dialectically it is what

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one would expect, since a dialectical process proceeds by the development and synthesis of contradictions. He would conclude, therefore, that the probability of a war in which this country might take part in the near future could not be estimated by the growth of a strong sentiment in favour of peace. He might even think that the growth of this sentiment tended to prove the likelihood of war, not its improbability.

Now let us take stock. We have seen that the full rejection of idealism leads to the view that action is primary. This yields the principle of the unity of theory and practice. As applied to social history this principle, in turn, demands a dialectical interpretation of history. But the most famous element in communist theory is not the dialectical but the economic interpretation of history. How do we reach this final conclusion? Before answering that question I should like to point out that there may be an economic interpretation of history which is not dialectical. Indeed, most historians nowadays do adopt an economic interpretation. Indeed, if we are to explain social history in its full scope we must do so. But the Marxian economic interpretation is a dialectical interpretation, and this is of its essence. Moreover, the Marxian

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reason for interpreting history in terms of economics lies in the dialectical nature of the social process. Let us see what there is in this.

The Marxist holds that the real substance of society is persons in relation. The development of society is, therefore, a development of the form of the relationship between persons in society. But the relation is not a static relation. It is a matter of action, and the form of an active relationship between a group of persons is their form of co-operation. If we now ask what it is that determines the form in which people co-operate, we must obviously answer that the form of co-operation is determined by the common end which they pursue. What, then, is the common end which all the members of any society pursue and which, therefore, determines the form of their relationship to one another? The Marxian answer is that the common aim is the provision of the necessities of life. Now this is the field of economics and, therefore, the form of social co-operation will be determined by the economic needs of the society. Further, the development of this form of relationship will be determined by changes in the actual economic situation. If, then, we are to understand what governs the process of social development,

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we must discover what it is that changes the actual economic situation. The Marxian, therefore, argues that if we disregard temporary and local factors, and look at the broad movement of social life, we shall see that the determining factor is the power of society to provide for its economic needs. It is this power to satisfy fundamental needs that is summed up in the phrase 'the means of production'. At any particular period of history for any particular society the means of production are fixed. On the one hand there are certain natural resources, on the other hand a certain amount of available labour-power to utilize these resources, that is to say, to turn the available resources into a form in which they can be used. What, then, is it that permits of a development in this situation? It is in the main the increase in human power to use the available resources. Suppose that the resources and the available labour-power remain the same. We get a development of society whenever the same amount of labour-power can turn more of the available resources in the same time into a form in which they can be used for satisfying human needs. Such a change is an improvement in the means of production. The governing factor in the process of history is, therefore, the steady improve-

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ment in the means of production. That is roughly what we mean by an improvement in technical capacity.

How, then, does this affect the substance of society, that is to say, the relation of persons in the process of development? The Marxian answer is that it produces a struggle between persons for the control of the means of production. This is, in fact, a struggle for economic security. All the other forms of the struggle for power are phenomenal forms of this struggle for the control of the means of production. And since the ultimate form of the control of the means of production is their possession, the fundamental factor which determines the form of the relationship of persons in any stage of society is the ownership of the means of production. Thus, the process of society is the story of changes in the ownership of the means of production. Without going into details of the distribution of this ownership we may draw the main conclusion. At any stage in the historic process of social development, society is divided into two main classes, the class of people who own the means of production and the class of people who do not and who, therefore, are dependent for their livelihood on those who do. This is the basis of the

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class-theory of the dialectical process in history. But since at this point some criticism becomes necessary, I propose to leave the further development of my theme for the next chapter.

III

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I have attempted to show how the general structure of the Marxian interpretation of social history grows out of the rejection of the idealism of Hegelian philosophy while retaining its other fundamental principles. The main new principle, the principle of the necessary unity of theory and practice, demands a theory of society which is scientific, in the sense that it can be used as a basis for deliberate social action which will bring the development of society under the control of human understanding and so make men at last masters of their own destiny. Just as the control of nature depends upon an understanding of the laws that govern the behaviour of natural objects and upon a willingness to accept and to co-operate with these laws, so the control of our human life in society depends upon an objective understanding of the laws which govern social behaviour, and upon a

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willingness to submit to them and co-operate with them. The first necessity is to get rid of illusion; especially of the illusion that we are free to do as we please—that anything that we care to set up as an ideal of life is actually possible. We are free to imagine what we please in thought, but we are not free to do whatever we imagine desirable. What is possible in practice depends upon our power over the conditions of social and individual life. That is why the first real question must be the question of the limits of practical possibility. Now, all action is physical; it is action through matter upon matter. The limits of human freedom are material limits. Inevitably and inexorably the problem of freedom is a problem of the control of the material conditions of human action. This problem has, however, two sides. It is a problem of the general increase of human power over the natural conditions of life. But it is also a problem of the distribution of that power between persons in society. Thus the Marxian interpretation of social history is concerned with the development of the means of production (i.e., with the increase of man's control over nature) and with the struggle within societies for the use of this growing power between different classes in

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society (that is, with the social struggle for the ownership of the means of production).

At this point we must attempt to estimate the validity of these general principles. Hitherto we have merely been attempting to understand them and their general application. But before proceeding to criticism it is wise to remind ourselves that in the criticism of communist philosophy there is more than the usual danger of prejudice. It is always easy to find points of objection to any theory which human thought can construct. If we have a practical interest in the rejection of any theory, therefore, it is always possible to find grounds for rejecting it. This is, of course, a completely unscientific and unphilosophical method of procedure; and it is one from which communist thought in particular has suffered severely. It is quite the fashion, for instance, to submit the 'labour theory of value' with which Marx's *Capital* commences, to a rigorous examination, and to prove that it is untenable. Having done so, it is common to dismiss Marx as a charlatan and conclude that the whole of communist thought rests upon an economic fallacy. Such a procedure is intellectually monstrous and morally insincere. It is true that most orthodox economists at the

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present day are agreed that the labour theory of value is untenable. They may be right in this or they may be wrong. But the labour theory of value was not even invented by Marx. It was the theory of the orthodox economists of Marx's time. If its rejection is a reason for dismissing Marx as a charlatan, it is a reason for dismissing Adam Smith as a charlatan also. But he, on the contrary, is honoured as the classical source of economic theory. Obviously it is not to what Marx has in common with Adam Smith that objection is really taken, but to the points in which he differs from him.

In the second place you will notice that in expounding the general principles of Marxian social theory I did not even require to refer to the labour theory of value. That must mean that the general principles of communist philosophy are independent of this particular theory and similarly of other particular theories to be found in Marx and other communist thinkers. It would be possible to take a more modern theory of value and interpret it in terms of the general principles of communist thought with equally 'disastrous' results to current social idealism. It is not possible, therefore, to dispose of Marxism except by challenging the fundamental principles of its methodology of interpreta-

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tion. Of these principles there is only one which is absolutely essential and that is the principle of the unity of theory and practice. It is this principle which makes communist philosophy not so much a particular philosophical system amongst others, as a new type of philosophy altogether, involving a new conception of what theory is and of how any theory is to be judged.

There is a corollary of this which is often overlooked even by communists and which, therefore, may be stated as a criticism, not so much of the principles of communist philosophy, as of the tendency of communist thinkers to fail to understand the implications of their own position. The principle of the unity of theory and practice must itself apply to communist philosophy. Marxism is necessarily subject to its own law of the development of theory through experimental action. In other words, the philosophy of communism is not merely a philosophy of dialectical development, it is itself, if it is true to itself, a dialectically developing philosophy. To be a dogmatic Marxist, therefore, is to repudiate Marxism. The tendency to think of the body of Marx's writings as a new revelation which forms a standard of orthodoxy for communists developed early amongst Marx's

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disciples. It was this no doubt that led Marx to exclaim on one occasion (if the report be trustworthy): 'Thank God I am not a Marxist!' It is often triumphantly pointed out that the Russian Revolution did not follow the lines mapped out by Marx for a communist revolution and that Lenin was compelled to develop a new theory which differs in important respects from that of Marx. That is, however, not an objection to Marxism or to Leninism. To think it is, is simply to fail to understand Marxian theory and to relapse into idealism. The real question is this: 'Is Leninism a true dialectical development of Marxism?' If Marxian theory is scientific then it must be capable of experimental development.

Any serious criticism of communist philosophy must start by declaring openly how much of its theory is accepted by the critic. I must therefore preface my criticism by saying that I accept the rejection of idealism and the principle of the unity of theory and practice in the sense in which I have expounded it. And since this is the truly revolutionary principle, such an acceptance involves taking one's stand within the tradition of thought which derives from Marx. The negative implications of accepting this fundamental principle go

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very deep. They include the rejection of all philosophy and all social theory which does not accept this principle, not because of particular objections to their conclusions, but because of a complete break with the assumptions upon which they are based and the purpose which governs their development. They involve the belief that all theory must seek verification in action and adapt itself to the possibility of experiment. They make a clean sweep of all speculative thought on the ground that the validity of no belief whatever is capable of demonstration by argument. They involve a refusal at any point to make knowledge an end in itself, and equally, the rejection of the desire for certainty which is the motive governing speculative thought. The demand for personal certainty is only the ideal reflection of the demand for personal security and that demand is the psychological basis of the struggle for power between individuals, classes, nations and empires. It follows that any social or philosophical theory which we can then accept, must be either the Marxian theory or some development of the Marxian theory through a process of criticism which falls within the general principles upon which Marxian theory is based. This does not exclude a clearer state-

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ment of the fundamental principles than is to be found in Marx himself or in orthodox communist philosophy at the present time. The detailed development of any scientific theory always throws light upon the philosophical and methodological principles on which it is based.

The main criticism which I have to offer is concerned with the metaphysical principle which is common to Hegelianism and dialectical materialism, the principle that reality is an organic process, and, therefore, can only be understood dialectically. I do not believe that this principle is adequate to the nature of reality as we know it. And since it is in the field of human relationships that the grounds for saying that reality is not an organic process are to be found, the denial of this principle throws doubt upon the interpretation of social history as an organic, and therefore a dialectical, process. Now, there are two ways in which such a criticism can be taken. It might mean that one rejected the principle because one was not convinced that it had substantiated its claims to supersede the mechanical principle in opposition to which it was developed. It is not in this sense that I wish to criticize the organic view of the nature of reality. On the contrary, I think that

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Hegel made out his case completely and that, therefore, the organic interpretation of reality is much more adequate than any other that we possess. My criticism is rather that though the dialectical interpretation of reality is a great advance on the mechanical, it doesn't go far enough. As I pointed out earlier, the acceptance of the principle of the unity of theory and practice does involve the view that reality is either organic or superorganic. It cannot be less than organic.

What, then, is the criticism? You will remember that for Marx, society is persons in relation. Although this is true, it is necessary to point out that the relations of persons in society are of more than one type. They are, in fact, of three different kinds. There are relations in which one set of persons uses another set of persons as instruments for their own purposes. These relations are of a mechanical type. There are relations in which a number of people co-operate for the achievement of a common purpose. These relations are organic. Now, dialectical materialism does justice to both these types of relationship by an organic theory which takes up the mechanical relationships into its organic interpretation. But there is a third type of relationship which consists in the relation of

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persons as persons, a form of relationship of which friendship is the type. Within any society, at any period of social development, these relationships are to be found. And the peculiarity of them is that they do not themselves go through the dialectical process of social history. Friendship, for example, is just friendship in England or in equatorial Africa, in the twentieth century A.D. or in the twentieth century B.C. Such relationships are in their nature eternal, not in the sense that they last forever, but because they remain essentially the same in form under any conditions of social life. And they do this because they are the ultimate expressions of what human nature essentially is, quite apart from the particular forms of organization which make up the complex of society under the special conditions of any place or any epoch. Such relationships I call personal relationships. A study of such relationships shows that they cannot be interpreted either in mechanical or in organic terms, and that therefore they constitute the social aspect of that which distinguishes human life from all merely organic life. This is not the place to discuss the nature of personal relationships. It is enough to point to the fact that there is in human social experience an

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element which is superorganic, and that all the characteristic features of personal, as distinct from subpersonal, life are directly related to it. This means, in turn, that personal reality is superorganic, and a universe that contains within it something which is superorganic cannot itself be merely organic. Thus, the principle that reality is an organic process must be inadequate to the facts of personal experience.

The question that then faces us is the question whether human social history can be interpreted adequately as an organic process of development. To this question there can be no doubt that a negative answer must be given, if we mean to take the dialectical principle as capable of interpreting and explaining the whole development of human history. If there is a superorganic element in all human life, obviously a merely organic explanation of all human history must be inadequate and misleading. On the other hand, there is certainly an aspect of history which is organic and to which the principle of dialectical interpretation must apply. To say that man is an animal or an organism is obviously true, even though it is not the whole truth. Human life has an organic aspect, and for that reason human history has an aspect in which

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it is an organic process. May it not be that the aspect of human history which Marx interprets dialectically and in terms of economics is, in fact, the organic aspect of human history and that, within the limits to which he applies it, his analysis is perfectly adequate and in principle trustworthy? That is the important question which we have to answer.

I have put my criticism in abstract philosophical terms. Now let me put it more concretely. In an organic process we have an interaction between two factors, the organism and its environment. The growth of the organism is a process of change in it by which it adapts itself to the environmental conditions upon which its life depends. An organic process is, therefore, a process of adaptation to the environment, and the peculiar character which belongs to any organism consists in this capacity to adapt itself to its environment. The capacity is not, of course, unlimited. An organism may fail to adapt itself to its environment. But if it does, it dies. The same is true of that larger process of growth which we call evolution. It is essentially a process of adaptation to environment. Thus to hold that social history is a process of organic development is to hold that it is a process in which

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society adapts itself like an organism to the environmental conditions under which it lives. It is to treat it essentially as a process of adaptation.

Now, in a process of adaptation to environment, it is the environment which is the governing factor. This does not mean that it is the environment which produces the growth. The development of the organism depends primarily upon its own capacity for adaptation. The environment does not adapt the organism to itself. The effort comes from the organism. All that it means is that the environment and any changes in the environment are given, and the effort of the organism is an effort to change *itself* so as to maintain itself in the environment. It is in that sense only that the environment is the governing factor. It follows that if we interpret social history as an organic process, as Marx does, we shall maintain, in this sense, that the environment is the governing factor. This, however, is not to say that human nature is purely passive in relation to the environment, as it is often represented to mean. The effort which results in social development comes entirely from man, not from the environment. Society adapts *itself* to its environment, the environment does not adapt society to itself. To say that the material

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factor is the governing factor is merely to say that society must adapt itself to the material conditions of life if it is not to perish. In interpreting social history as an organic process, Marx makes the assumption that this effort will go on. Perhaps it is worth while to point out at once that this assumption is not absolutely certain. Quite a number of societies have failed to adapt themselves to a changing environment and have in consequence perished. The Red Indians of North America and the Aborigines of Australia are cases in point. These races are in process of extinction. But these are extreme cases. When we talk of social development we are thinking of a general continuity in the forms which a particular society develops to meet the needs of a growing population and of a growing demand for material or cultural satisfaction. From this point of view many societies have developed up to a point and then perished as societies, even though their members or a good number of them have not perished but merely been absorbed into the organization of some other and stronger societies. We cannot, therefore, assume that even the economic progress of Europe will go on. It is quite possible that it might cease or even relapse into a barbarism

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rather like that of the Dark Ages. The effort to adapt itself to an increasingly complex situation may fail. From certain points of view it might even seem probable that in the general development of human society in the world, Europe has played its part and that the next stage of social development should take place elsewhere, possibly in the Far East.

Here, then, we have discovered an important limitation of Marxian theory as applied to the process of social development in Europe. Communists usually argue that the next stage in the development of Europe must necessarily be the formation of a communist society. That is only true on the assumption that the process continues, and the continuance of the process depends upon the persistence of the social impulse to carry on the struggle. This will to progress expresses itself in the field of ideas as the demand for freedom. We noticed, you will remember, that Marx implicitly agreed to this in his criticism of Max Stirner. It is possible, however, that the will to freedom should subside and that through weariness of the struggle we should resign ourselves to defeat.

But now comes the main question. Is it true that

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human development is merely a process of adaptation to environment, in which the environment is the governing factor? To this question we must answer, 'No'. Part of the process is an effort to adapt the environment to man. So far as we discover how to control nature by understanding the laws of natural processes we are in a position to escape from the necessity of adapting ourselves to nature and to adapt nature to ourselves. In proportion as this alternative is achieved, human development ceases to be merely an organic process and becomes superorganic. This is a curious fact about the development of scientific understanding. It is by understanding the natural laws that make it impossible for human beings to fly that we find ourselves able to construct machines in which we can fly. We escape from the determination of natural laws by understanding natural law and accepting it as the rule of our own action.

There is one point in which this limitation of the dialectical interpretation of history reveals itself very clearly. The communist holds that the historic process is essentially a struggle between social classes for the control of the means of production. But he also holds that this process, if it goes on long enough, must result in the production of a classless

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society. That would mean that this interpretation of the process would cease to be true, because in a classless society there could be no struggle between social classes. There are no social classes to continue the struggle. Marx, of course, was not unaware of this. It led to the statement that with the achievement of communism prehistory would come to an end and history would begin. That is an admission that the economic interpretation of history, with which the Marxists have made us familiar, is only applicable to the immaturity of social life. A truly human society would follow a process of development which could not be interpreted dialectically, that is to say, as a process of adaptation to the environment. This is one of my main reasons for the doubt which I expressed in the first chapter whether Marx himself accepted the principle that reality is an organic process. Whether Marx accepted this principle or not we are bound to reject it and so to demand a modification of orthodox communist philosophy, which certainly does accept it.

But here we must be particularly careful not to assume that this means that we need pay no more attention to communist theory. All that the rejection of this principle involves is the admission that

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the economic interpretation of history applies only within limits. It does not apply to social history after the establishment of communism. And that, even in the case of Russia, is still in the future. The Marxian theory may still apply to our past and our present. We must therefore ask whether within these limits it is possible to accept the Marxian analysis. My answer is that it is both possible and necessary.

For a very long time and, indeed, in principle, since man became man, the personal life of human beings has never been purely organic. So far as purposes are deliberately formed and action is deliberately chosen, human life is superorganic. Within any human society there has always been a field of individual and social freedom. Friendships between individuals, for example, have never been completely determined by economic relations or even by common purposes. The range of this freedom has of course always been limited by economic conditions, and in the process of human social development every step in progress has meant an enlargement of the field of free relationship. It is, for instance, very much easier to-day for people belonging to different social classes to enter into friendly relations, or even to marry, than

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it was a hundred years ago. The superorganic element in society has, therefore, been increasing in importance during the process of social development. But it does not follow that this makes any difference to the interpretation of social development as a whole.

If a process of human development is to be an organic process, what is necessary is simply that the process should be unconscious, that is to say, that it should not be rationally controlled on the basis of rational understanding. It is only with the achievement of rational activity that we escape from the organic field into the field of truly human or personal activity. So long, therefore, as the development of society as a whole is not rationally understood, planned and controlled by society itself, it remains an organic process. There can be no doubt that this is true still and always has been true in the development of human history. There never has been yet any society which planned and controlled its development as a society on the basis of a scientific understanding. The Marxian theory is indeed the first sketch of the kind of understanding upon which such a controlled social development might be based, and Soviet Russia is the first human society which has made the attempt in

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practice. Indeed, it is not possible to say that Russia is doing it to-day, for two reasons. The first is that Russia is merely making a heroic effort to provide the conditions under which it could be done. The second is that Russia remains one society amongst others which are not communist even in intention and that her actual development is necessarily controlled to a considerable extent by the pressure of these other societies. She has to adapt herself to her social environment. However much superorganic freedom or rational planning or action there may be within society at the present time, the development of society itself is at best the resultant of the interaction of such activities. It is not itself a rational activity but a mere growth or development of an unconscious and, therefore, organic type. And quite palpably the net result of this interaction of conscious purposes is determined by the economic factor.

Now, we might suggest under these circumstances—as, indeed, thousands of people are suggesting—that we should take control of the social development by planning the economic structure of our society as a whole, and that in that way we should escape from the economic determinism of history, without accepting communism as the form

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of our social organization. In that case Marxism would cease to be applicable. In other words, we can ask: 'Why need a plan for social development be a communist one?' The answer is that a communist society is the only form of society in which the planning of social development is possible. That is the communist answer and I am convinced that it is the right one. In the first place, the development of society has hitherto been economically determined because of the fact of scarcity. The conditions under which human societies could as a whole control nature sufficiently to provide adequately for the elementary needs of everyone have never existed until the present day. It required the development of science to make the control of the environment by man possible. It still requires the proper application of that scientific knowledge to make the control actual. We are now, it would seem, potentially free from the absolute necessity to be controlled in the structure of our social life by our material environment. We are not actually in control of it and there are certain social conditions which must be fulfilled if we are to realize our power to control nature and provide for the needs of all our people. The main condition is that the struggle for power should

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cease and be replaced by co-operation in terms of welfare. So long as the struggle for the control of the means of production goes on, so long social life and social development cannot be planned as a whole. It must be merely the resultant of that struggle. The form of society in which we live is capitalist. That means, as we saw, that it consists of two main classes of people—those who need not work if they don't want to, and those who must work or starve. The first class are independent, the second class are dependent. And the independent class are independent because of their ownership and control of the means of production. So much is mere fact. The distinction is a distinction in the control of power over nature, which means, socially, power over other people's lives. As a result the whole of national and international conduct is determined by the power-motive. A manufacturer who owns his own factory, for example, must conduct his business in such a way as to produce a profit. He may be a completely benevolent man, thoroughly interested in the welfare of his employees, but if he does not make a profit he goes bankrupt, and so ceases to own the means of production without which he cannot carry on his business. To carry on at all, therefore, he must

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compete, that is to say he must engage in a struggle for power with other people. The conditions of social relationship both national and international under our present system are, therefore, throughout governed by the effort to achieve and maintain power. Struggle for control is the condition of maintaining the capitalist form of society, whether between individuals or groups or classes or nations or empires. And it is quite compatible with a pervading goodwill on the part of the majority of people both within a particular nation and between nations. Now, the peculiarity of power as an end is that it is impossible to get it except at someone else's expense. Power is essentially relative. If one party gains in a struggle for power the other party necessarily loses. If the end is welfare, this is not so. It follows that if social development is to be planned and controlled, the struggle for power must cease and social relations must, therefore, cease to be determined through the control and ownership of the means of production. In particular, the division of society into a class which owns and controls the means of production and a class which does not must disappear. The primary condition of a planned social development and, therefore, of the disappearance of

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economic determinism in the development of society is the realization of a society without social classes. And a classless society is a communist society. Communism is, therefore, the necessary basis of real freedom. Marx was perfectly right in describing the new form of society as a human society. For it is the only possible form of social relationship in which human development ceases to be merely an organic process and becomes an activity of rational beings.

IV

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The philosophical task which I have set myself is now completed. I have been concerned not to defend communism as a social movement in our midst, but to estimate the philosophy which lies behind it and to determine how much of it must command the assent of the philosopher who understands its fundamental principles. But it is impossible to do this without raising questions of a much more concrete and practical kind. In particular, the question of the means by which the classless society is to be brought into existence, and the bearing of my philosophical criticism upon the orthodox communist conception of a revolutionary action for the establishment of communism demands consideration. I shall therefore attempt in this chapter to apply the result of my philosophical analysis to the contemporary situation.

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What strikes me most forcibly about current communist propaganda is the absence in it of true dialectical thought. Instead we find a kind of Marxian fundamentalism which, while it takes its stand upon the teaching of Marx and his more prominent followers, denies the essential revolutionary element in Marxism. To be a dogmatic Marxist is to involve oneself in a practical contradiction and to fall back unawares into the very idealism which Marx repudiated. For though the form of one's profession may be materialistic, its fundamentalist content makes it necessarily non-dialectical. A mechanistic materialism, for all its language, is still a form of idealism. To insist on the acceptance of Marxian ideas is to value ideas above things.

This orthodox fundamentalism reveals its non-dialectical character in its failure to recognize that the revolution which Marx prophesied has already taken place. That it happened in Russia and not elsewhere is a matter of considerable importance. It forces a reinterpretation in dialectical terms of the forecasts which Marx himself made. That reinterpretation has been provided by Lenin and Leninism is now fairly generally accepted amongst communists as a dialectical development of ortho-

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dox Marxism. On the other hand, the transference of communist fundamentalism to Leninism does not make it less dogmatic, and the consequences of this transference remain unrecognized. Communists still continue to expect that something like the Russian revolution will happen in the more highly industrialized countries of Western Europe. To expect this is to fail to think dialectically.

There are two points which call for special notice. That the revolution which Marx foresaw happened in a largely feudal community, like Czarist Russia, while Marx himself was convinced that it must happen in a highly industrialized community, shows that there was a flaw in Marx's principles of interpretation. It cannot be a matter of chance. The immediate conclusion which we have to draw and interpret dialectically is that the Marxian interpretation does work under feudal conditions in a world where industrialism has developed elsewhere. The first generalization which this suggests is that it is more likely that the revolution should spread eastward to China, Japan and India than that it should spread westwards to the industrial countries of Europe and to the United States of America. The ground for accepting this suggestion lies in the criticism of principles

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which we have already completed. An organic theory necessarily overlooks the superorganic elements which exist as forces of social development along with the organic forces. It therefore looks to mass-action alone as a revolutionary driving force, and, psychologically, mass-action is blind action determined by the stimulus of environmental pressure. Now, the more highly industrialized a community becomes, the more the maintenance of its economic struggle depends upon a purposeful and planned co-operation. It is this, in fact, which impels all capitalist governments to institute universal, compulsory education. Under these conditions the effort to bring about a mass movement must involve, if it is to be successful, a reduction of the rational and deliberate consciousness of the community to the impulsive level. I do not say that this is impossible, though it is certainly difficult. There are forces in capitalist society which make for the mechanization of the mind and the paralysis of the capacity for conscious reflection. But its success would necessarily destroy the purposeful co-operation on which the working of a highly industrialized system depends. Thus the success of a mass-movement, by endangering the economic mechanism by which the community

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lives, would produce through the ordinary organic processes of adaptation a national dictatorship in the interests of the maintenance of the national economic system. In other words it would produce a fascist dictatorship. In communities like Czarist Russia, a mass-movement can have the opposite result because it can be harnessed to the task of creating an industrial structure which is still only in embryo, and because it is still close to the communal traditions of pre-capitalist society.

This brings us to the second point. Lenin worked on the hypothesis that the bolshevik revolution in Russia would spread within a reasonably short time over the rest of Europe. He assumed, that is to say, that in the dialectic of history the bolshevik revolution would be the final revolutionary movement and usher in the communization of the economic life of the world. But this has not happened. And the point in history which makes it clear that it will not happen is the acceptance by Russia of the task of creating a communist society within Russia itself in isolation from the rest of the world. The defeat of Trotsky on this very point and the abandonment by Russia of the hope of an immediate world-revolution must be interpreted dialectically as the assertion of the existing regime

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in the Soviet Union, not as the final synthesis of the historic process, but as the thesis of a new stage. In accordance with the dialectical law this thesis must now produce its antithesis. That antithesis is fascism. The development of fascism in Italy and Germany is quite obviously, to any dialectical thinker, the sign that bolshevism has produced its own negation and that beyond both thesis and antithesis lies the final accomplishment of the synthesis through which alone a classless society can be achieved. It is through the negation of the negation that the final stage of the dialectic must be reached. Any communist theory which fails to recognize that we are now in the stage of the development of the antithesis to bolshevism, convicts itself of its failure to maintain the dialectical principle of interpretation on which communist theory is based.

Fascism is undoubtedly a phenomenon of negation. It is not, however, for that reason, a mere reaction. It is not for fraudulent purposes that fascism considers itself to be a socialist movement. It derives its meaning as well as its existence from the limitations inherent in the thesis which it negates. In the dialectical sense, both bolshevism and fascism contain their opposites within themselves.

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The dictatorship of the communist party in Soviet Russia is itself the negation of the Soviet system, which rests on the principle of democratic freedom carried to the stage of economic realization. Fascism isolates this dictatorship, which for the communist is transitional, as a final end and hence comes to stand for authority, discipline and organization imposed by force as the ideal form of social life. But in this complete denial of freedom and equality it rests unconsciously on the demand of the masses for the solution of their economic problem. And it depends upon the co-operation of the working class, which is necessarily a socialist class, through economic interests, for its support. Bolshevism and fascism are, therefore, thesis and antithesis in the dialectical development of socialism. It is only through the interpenetration of these opposites that the final synthesis can be reached and it must be achieved as the reassertion of the thesis at a higher level when it has done justice to the essential truth upon which the antithesis was based.

The true objective of socialism is the emancipation of mankind through the achievement of economic freedom for all. This necessarily involves the achievement of a classless society, since the

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phenomenon of class is an expression of degrees of economic servitude. But this objective, which is consciously realized by communism, cannot be achieved at the level of action which current communist theory accepts. At that level the impossibility of success can only result in the production of its negation at the same level—in fascism. The true communist revolution remains, therefore, to be achieved at a higher level, and therefore through the negation of that limitation in current communist action which becomes explicit in fascism. This limitation, which becomes the essential dogma of fascism, is the belief that it is possible to impose freedom by force. This contradictory idea is essentially a continuation of bourgeois social organization. Rousseau expressed it succinctly at the beginning of the democratic period when he talked of rebellious citizens being forced to be free. It arises in practice from the bourgeois habit of looking to the organized mechanism of political authority as the sole source of initiative in social development. The idea that it is necessary, if a classless society is to be brought into existence, to aim first at capturing the political organization of the state commits the communist to the acceptance of the machinery of force for the creation of free-

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dom. And since that mechanism is designed for the repression of revolt against authority of a capitalist type, the acceptance of this method for the creation of a new society defeats its own ends. It establishes the conception of authority and, therefore, of imposed discipline upon which fascism, as the negation of freedom, rests. It is this practical belief in the mechanism of the state which is the common ground of communism and fascism. It is through this unity that they are antithetical, and it is only through the negation of this reliance upon authority that we can reach the higher ground on which the synthesis can be achieved. We have to look away from the organized authority of the state and of all subordinate political mechanisms to achieve a freedom for all which is both real and practical. The classless society must be based not upon the antithesis of freedom and discipline, not upon their conjunction, but upon their synthesis.

At this point we are brought back to the old democratic conception of a discipline that is self-imposed and of a society in which the members themselves create the laws which they obey. But though in idea this is the solution of our problem, its contemporary form is purely ideal. It never comes into contact with the economic factor which

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governs the actual situation in human society. It is obviously untrue to say that the arrival of universal suffrage is the achievement of equality. It may be the symbol of equality, but, if so, it is the symbol of a hope and of a demand. Until there is reasonable security that an individual cannot be forced into subservience to another by the threat of economic need, it is plainly absurd to maintain that freedom and equality have been achieved. And it is upon freedom and equality that democracy rests.

It is obvious, too, that the economic situation demands a new achievement of social discipline for its solution. The mere fact that careful planning at least of national and probably of international scope is essential to any solution involves this. For a plan of such magnitude is merely words unless it is put into operation. And its operation means the co-operation of countless individuals towards a common end. The question at issue is whether this discipline will be imposed from above or freely accepted as a personal responsibility by the individuals concerned. Such an acceptance of discipline is out of the question, if it involves a plan which negates the interests of masses of men and women as responsible, free human beings. What can this mean except that they should be granted

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unequivocally their rights as human beings in the economic field? And to do this is to establish a classless society. This question is not a question of economics merely. It is a question of simple, concrete justice.

The broad facts of the contemporary situation are these. The development of capitalism in the economic field has brought us to the point at which its successful working is incompatible with democracy as we know it. That this would necessarily happen was foreseen accurately enough by Marx. But he took it for granted—as we have all done until recently, whatever our political opinions—that in that situation capitalism would have to go. The reason for that assumption was simple. The working class is the majority in society and under democracy it possesses the political power to establish itself, if it will, as the predominant political force. That this would involve a strong resistance from the entrenched forces of capitalism, and a struggle to overcome that resistance, does not matter. Democracy would still have been the historical training ground of the working class in political action for political ends. What nobody, not even Marx, foresaw as a possibility was that democracy should go overboard with the consent

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of the masses in the interests of a purely economic solution, and that politics, in the sense in which we have known it, should be destroyed in the interests of a state-form which is purely economic and administrative. Yet this is precisely what has happened and is happening in the development of fascism. Such a solution, by which politics is swallowed up in economics, was, until it actually happened in Italy, simply inconceivable to the European mind. That the people should abdicate all their political rights, and with them all that gives meaning to human life, in the interests of a successful functioning of the existing economic machinery simply could not have occurred to any European of the nineteenth century. To this day, even with that solution unfolding itself before our eyes on the Continent, we are incapable of recognizing it for what it is. Fascism is not a new form of politics. It is the negation of politics. For politics is simply that field of social organization which exists to secure to men and women their rights as human beings against the impact of powers and forces which do not recognize their humanity. Politics is the field of the perpetual struggle of right against power, of reason and justice against naked force. To create a state which exists only as

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an outgrowth of economics and which suppresses the human freedom of its members for the sake of economic efficiency is to negate politics. The recognition of equality is the basis of justice and law.

Fascism, is, therefore, a completely new factor in the European situation which no system of social thought has ever even dreamed of. In essence it is far more revolutionary than communism, and orthodox communism has no answer to it. For it was communism itself which chose to insist that economics was the determining factor in human life and that politics was merely an expression of the economic organization of society. That is precisely what fascism seeks to make of society—a corporate, functional economic organization in which what has been politics becomes merely the administrative function of the economic organism. The only possible answer is to insist that there are aspects of human life which are of more importance than economics, and that freedom and equality must not be sacrificed to the demand for material power, whether that demand is made in the name of the capitalist class or of the working class. It is only as a demand for freedom and justice that the struggle of the oppressed classes for equality and

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freedom can, in the nature of things, be realized. Once subordinate politics to economics in theory, and the case for the emancipation of the worker—and for the emancipation of women, which is another aspect of the same issue—goes by the board.

The creation of a classless society through the destruction of economic privilege is, then, I repeat, the immediate, rational end of our social development. But its rationality and its necessity are not derived from any economic determinism. They are grounded in the essential nature of human personality, of which economic need is only one aspect, however important. What is required as the basis of any communist society is that we should escape from individualism in our personal life. It is quite possible to secure economic equality for a society of confirmed individualists. It might, indeed, be forced upon them by the instinct for self-preservation. But such a society would necessarily be based, like Hobbes's Leviathan, on sheer force. It would involve a permanent dictatorship over the whole field of national life. From any human point of view it would be a *reductio ad absurdum* of individualism. The last effort to preserve one's precious self would have consisted in the destruc-

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tion of everything that gives selfhood a positive significance.

Communism is not ultimately a matter of economics, even though it carries as a consequence some approach to economic equality. It is a matter of the inherently social nature of human personality. It must rest upon the need that men and women feel for living their lives in community. This, indeed, is the real need of all human nature. Against its achievement there stands the long tradition of the struggle to achieve free individuality, and the fear in men and women who are still unsure of themselves that their individuality would be swamped in any form of communal existence. It is this fear which is the secret motive in all the forms of opposition to the socialization of life. The answer to it is simple. That fear must inevitably produce the very fate that it dreads. 'He that saveth his life shall lose it.' Individuality can only maintain itself in community. Hitherto the development of individualism has been possible only through the family, and, therefore, because women have been prepared to waive their claims to be free individuals. But now in increasing numbers they are insisting on their rights to express and maintain their individual independence. That claim

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cannot and should not be denied. But we must recognize that an individualism which embraces all individuals irrespective of sex means the disintegration of society into its constituent atoms. Long before that point is reached, it will become necessary for the state to enforce some form of organized social co-operation to take the place of the natural sociality which is being lost. Beyond a certain point the development of individualism means the destruction of individuality. There is only one way in which we can escape from some form of state-communism maintained by a dictatorship of force, which would destroy freedom and with it individuality, and that is by creating a form of community life which is compatible with the individuality of all its members. In either case the economic class-structure of capitalist society has to go. Individualism and communism are opposites and irreconcilable. Individuality and community are correlatives.

